

**Ambassador Sichan Siv
Asian Pacific American Heritage Month
The Department of State
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AS DELIVERED

Thank you very much Eun Yang for that kind introduction. I am delighted to join in this celebration. I salute the Office of Civil Rights for organizing this important event. When I received the invitation I said, *"I'll be there!" (Laughter.)* This morning when I left, I said to New York and the U.N. *"Hasta la vista, baby!" (Laughter.)* When I got here, in fact each time I am in Washington or the State Department I say, *"I'll be back!" (Laughter.)*

For a number of years, the President designated one week in May to honor our Asian/Pacific Heritage. In 1991 President Bush ("41") extended the commemoration to the whole month. I was working at the White House then, but I cannot confirm or deny that I had anything to do with it. *(Laughter.)*

President Bush ("43") carries on this proud tradition. In his Proclamation on May 3rd he focused on "Liberty and Freedom for All." He honored *"the sacrifices of Asian/Pacific Americans in the defense of freedom and democracy."* And he affirmed that those *"proud patriots"* who *"stepped forward and fought for the security of our country and the peace of the world...will always hold a cherished place in our history."*

President Bush has appointed 289 Americans of Asian/Pacific ancestry to his administration. Of these, 94 have Senate confirmation, including two cabinet members and one ambassador. You are looking at him. *(Laughter.)* The number of the appointments is much greater and their levels higher, than any previous administration within a similar time frame.

There are more than 13 million Americans of Asian and Pacific ancestry. They have excelled in the arts, broadcasting (Eun Yang is a role model), education, and sports. They are entrepreneurs, small business owners, and CEOs. We see them on TV, the big screen, and in space. For America, they win Nobel prizes, Olympic medals, and all kinds of competitions. Thousands are in our armed forces. In Operation Iraqi Freedom, Corporal Edward Chin (3rd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment) from New York pulled down the statue of Saddam Hussein. Lance Corporal Sokhak Ung (2nd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment) from California participated in the rescue of Army Private Jessica Lynch. Two weeks later, he suffered a shrapnel wound and was awarded a Purple Heart. Tragically, he was later killed while on home leave in Long Beach.

50% of Asian and Pacific Americans, 25 and over, have a bachelor's degree or higher level of education. Their children are usually among the top of the class. Every year they constitute about a quarter of the Westinghouse science contest winners. A girl from Tennessee who spoke no English when her family arrived from Cambodia was a finalist

at the national spelling bee. She failed because she could not spell “*enchilada*.”
(*Laughter.*) President Reagan called to offer encouragement. The following year, she became the champion. Her life inspired Disney to make a movie entitled “*The Girl Who Spelled Freedom*.”

In classical diplomacy, the three Cs were *charm*, *champagne*, and *chandeliers*. In my books, they are the ability to *convey*, *convince*, and *convert*. And we should have fun doing it! The job requires not just a good suit and a strong liver, but also a big stomach.
(*Laughter.*) On overseas visits, I am sometimes treated to 20 course meals. Talk about eating and drinking for your country! (*Laughter.*) After a few days, I am eager to get back to our modest three course standards. (*Laughter*)

In New York, I have introduced another Asian staple: karaoke! (*Laughter*) We spend all day speaking and talking at the U.N. So I thought it would be good to lend a more melodious tone to our voices. I also try to show our colleagues some of America’s best. Recently, I took a group of ambassadors to visit that great symbol of freedom: the United States Military Academy. In exchanges with cadets, they were most impressed with the articulate views of our future military leaders. We also visited the U.S. Mint at West Point. I’ve never seen so much gold in my life! Each of us was allowed to hold a gold bar and keep it, at least through photos! (*Laughter.*)

Yesterday, our Mission joined others to commemorate International Day of Vesak at the U.N. This holiest Buddhist holiday celebrates the triple anniversary of Buddha’s birth, enlightenment, and passing. Tomorrow, I will host a reception to honor our Asian and Pacific colleagues and our common heritage.

Last October, I was privileged to represent America at the coronation of the king of Cambodia. The three-day ceremony began with a ritual purifying bath performed on the new king by his parents with holy water from Phnom Kulen, where Cambodia’s influential and powerful Angkor civilization was founded in 802 A.D. The dances that you are seeing today date from that period. Look at the dancers’ feet and fingers. Every move has a meaning. It was a great honor for me to be the only foreign delegation invited. Other countries were represented by their ambassadors accredited to Phnom Penh. During the solemn accession ceremony in the Throne Hall, the United States had two seats (our ambassador and myself), while others had only one. The next day the King Father and Queen Mother hosted a gala dinner for 100 guests. There was a song for each country present. America’s was “*I’ve been working on the railroad*.” (*Laughter.*) This is quite telling for many of our Asian forefathers came to help build the transcontinental railways.

This year’s theme of “Liberty and Freedom for All” is pertinent and laudable. The United States and its allies of democracy are proving that the forces of terror cannot stop the momentum of freedom. More than fifty million people who lived under brutal regimes in Afghanistan and Iraq are free and now on the road to democracy. As

President Bush said last November, “...we reaffirm our commitment to extending peace and freedom in the world.” And America’s support gives strength to oppressed people the world over. Lately, we have seen a number of colorful revolutions, including “Rose” in Georgia and “Orange” in the Ukraine.

In his latest address to the U. N. General Assembly, President Bush outlined a broad agenda for the world. He pledged to champion “*human dignity...The defeat of terror, the protection of human rights, the spread of prosperity, the advance of democracy.*” And in typically inclusive American fashion, he closed with the sentiment that: “*Each of us alone can only do so much. Together, we can accomplish so much more.*”

This idea of inclusion is central to our way of life. We are a nation of refugees and immigrants. And we thrive because all people find in America a ready place to call their own. Asian/Pacific Americans have found a home and made a contribution equal to any other. This, and every May, we are reminded that America’s unique strength lies in the fact that all ethnic groups are able to retain our heritage while assimilating: “*E Pluribus Unum.*” Because of this, people around the world will continue to recognize America as a beacon of “Liberty and Freedom for All.”

At the U.N., each time I walk in, my counterparts look at me. Through me, they see America; its promise and its opportunities. They want to hear what I have to say. The place becomes quiet, the minute I say “On behalf of the president, the people, and the government of the United States...” That is my proudest moment. Thank you. (*Applause.*)

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